

Connecticut State Consulting Committee For Agriculture Education

Appointed by the Commissioner of Education, Department of Education

Education Committee Hearing – March 10, 2008

Chairpersons, Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee

I am here to express support for Bill #5869 to increase funding for Vocational Agriculture, soon to be called Agricultural Science and Technology Education.

I am George Wheeler, from North Canaan, Chairman of the Connecticut Consulting Committee for Agriculture Education. Our committee is made up of representatives from the ag. industry, superintendents of schools, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, Ct Farm Bureau, support groups, and others from across the state. You have seen me here for the last couple of years, promoting an increase in help for both the 19 host centers as well as the sending towns to make it equitable for any qualified student in our state to attend an ag center. As a state regulated program, and I will add, an extremely successful program, our committee supports the need to continue to provide an opportunity for all students interested to study and pursue a career in natural resources, the green industry, aquaculture, agriculture engineering, or animal sciences. Bill #5869 will help a great deal toward this goal.

You have seen the study we completed three years ago showing the need and justification for the \$2500 per student state support. Some of the host center communities are questioning why should they accept other students from outside their communities and absorb the costs of educating them. Many of you have heard the reasons why sending towns are capping the number of students they will send to the ag centers. We are hearing more and more reasons, all related to costs, why qualified students cannot attend one of the ag centers.

Recently, we conducted a survey of the major concerns of each of the local agriculture centers. The two highest concerns were operating funds and the resistance for the sending towns to send qualified students. You have addressed these major issues in this one bill. We support bill #5869.

Our committee looks forward to working with you to help prepare our youth for a better Connecticut.

Thank you.